

**PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**“ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES OF RAT ABATEMENT,  
RECYCLING AND AIR QUALITY”**

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**CAROL SCHWARTZ, CHAIRPERSON**



**TESTIMONY OF**

**LESLIE A. HOTALING**

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

**WEDNESDAY, October 8, 2003**

**1 PM.**

**Council Chamber**

**John A. Wilson Building**

**1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Schwartz and other members of the Committee. I am Leslie Hotaling, Director of the Department of Public Works. Joining me today is Solid Waste Administrator, Tom Henderson. For the most part, I will be discussing the status of the District's residential recycling program. I also want to thank the Committee for its flexibility in allowing us to testify first, so that Tom and I may return to the Labor Management Symposium.

Let me start by saying that it has been a very tough year for the recycling program. We're not going to sugarcoat it in any way. We are frustrated and tired and we know the residents are, too. We know because they tell us. Customers in all wards have complained of missed collections, inconsistent service and lack of follow-up. Some of those customers have just stopped participating in the program. As a result, the tonnage of materials collected has stalled in the range of 13 to 15 percent of the total solid waste stream. In sharp contrast, both participation rates and amount of materials collected are up in the small test area in Ward 7 where DPW crews are picking up recyclables as part of our in-house pilot project.

As you know it had been our original intention to bring the recycling program in-house in 2003 following the expiration of our 5-year contract with Waste Management, Inc and its three LSDBE subcontracting firms. Unfortunately, other pressing budget priorities overtook this plan and DPW was forced to put off until 2005 any thought of taking the service back in-house. In fact, there were discussions throughout the FY 2004 budget deliberations over the future of the residential recycling program – whether it would be contracted in, suspended altogether or contracted out.

The decision ultimately made was to continue contracting service for the entire city for FY 2004 and work in FY 2005 to bring the outer ring collections back in house using single stream technology and DPW crews – a best practice adopted by cities across the country – Virginia Beach, Nashville and others.

However, by the time budget discussions for FY 04 were concluded, we found that we did not have enough time to solicit and award a new recycling collection contract before the expiration date. To prevent a lapse in service, we reached an agreement with Waste Management for a 120-day service extension under the old contract. As it happens, Waste Management is the only company that responded to our Invitation for Bids (IFB) for the next residential collection and processing contracts. We have just begun negotiating a new contract with them that will remedy the problems we experienced under the terms of the old contract. These remedies are designed to increase the contractor's accountability and make it extremely costly for them not to perform. For example, the assessment for missed collections under the new contract will call for a \$25 fine each time a missed collection is verified. This fine will increase to \$75 if the recyclables are not collected within 24 hours of the report. Should a missed collection be reported by the same household more than once, the fine will double. This is sharp contrast to the current fine structure which assesses a \$25 fine only after the contractor has had 24 hours from the time of notice to collect the material. The new contract also increases the number of field supervisors from one or two for the entire city, to one supervisor for every five collection routes.

These added provisions and the fact that our residents prefer that recyclables be collected at the same point of collection as their trash means added costs – in the first year, the total program is projected to cost \$6.4 million - \$3 million more than the previous contract bid over 5 years ago. However, when comparing collection costs to surrounding jurisdictions, we are not excessively higher than Montgomery County that has an equal amount of controls in its contracts:

You will recall that in FY 2002, DPW recycling contract monitors received 3582 complaints of missed recycling collection. We levied fines in the amount of \$10,050. But, residents were still crying out for more enforcement. It wasn't hard to figure out that two contract monitors just couldn't do the job alone. For the last several months, we have pulled investigators from SWEEP and, occasionally, from the commercial recycling program to investigate residential complaints logged through the city-wide call center. In FY 2003, we investigated 4,295 complaints and assessed over \$50,000 in missed collection fines. Clearly, if we wish to effectively monitor a residential recycling contract, our investigating force must be boosted from the current staffing level of 2 FTEs.

As I mentioned earlier, we were able to hang onto just enough of the recycling budget this year to maintain contracted services and start a small, in-house recycling pilot program, with the help of our Labor/Management Partnership. After four months, we are enormously encouraged by the response we've seen. At first, the pilot was implemented on one trash route in Ward 7, populated by 582 households. We wanted to begin with a

neighborhood that was representative of other Supercan collection areas, in terms of service mix (curbside vs. alley collection), population density and topography. *(Note: The route chosen is a roughly crescent-shaped area bounded by Texas Avenue, Burns Street, H Street, 46th Street, Southern Avenue, Massachusetts Avenue, Alabama Avenue, Burns Street, and Ridge Road SE.)*

DPW's Solid Waste Management Administration and its Labor Management Partner, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Local 2091, spent a year studying the current recycling collection system, as well as several alternatives before developing the pilot program. We owe a debt of thanks to James Ivey, President of Local 2091, for his hands-on support of this project.

Central to the proposed citywide program is the new 32-gallon BLUE recycling cart that replaces the old bins. Like miniature Supercans, the carts have wheels and lids. The pilot is also introducing residents to "Single Sort" recycling, which means that all recyclables will go into the same container. Customers no longer have to keep paper and other recyclables separated, nor will they have to lift heavy bins.

Over the course of the pilot program, DPW has been gathering operational data including the number of setouts and the amount of material (pounds) recycled. We think that customer service in the pilot area has already improved markedly. During the base period before the pilot began, an average of 17 percent of the residents were setting out recyclables for collection. The average amount set out per customer was 1.5 pounds. Since the pilot began on June 4<sup>th</sup>, participation has increased to 46 percent and the

amount set out per customer is approximately six pounds. Consistent services go a long way toward encouraging resident buy-in and participation. The pilot has been expanded to a total of 1180 households- two full trash routes – contiguous to the first pilot area. We are seeing the same rise in participation and diversion as we witnessed in the original area. These results prove to us that when DPW is allowed to fully fund this program, we will see some dramatic increases in the amount of material diverted from the waste stream.

Certainly, as results are analyzed, the program will be modified as needed. The pilot's early success has enabled us to expand the experiment to several additional routes. Full implementation in the remainder of the Supercan (once-a-week) trash collection area is tentatively scheduled for the first half of FY 2005, subject to budget authorization. Areas with twice-weekly trash collection are not affected and will continue to receive contract service and will continue using the recycling bins.

### **Commercial Recycling**

DPW's commercial recycling program is beginning to take root. Over the past two years, our commercial recycling inspectors have reached out to more than 3,150 businesses to provide technical education and advise on how to comply with the District's recycling law and institute a cost-effective collection program. More than 700 businesses have approved recycling plans, with another 720 in progress. Until recently, most of our efforts have been focused on educating the business community about the benefits of recycling. Since August, our commercial recycling inspectors have begun

enforcement of the recycling law in earnest, issuing 216 warnings and 41 notices of violation.

### **Education Curriculum**

I have always believed that recycling education should be part of schools' curricula. The DC Office of Recycling has entered into a multi-organizational partnership with the Department of Health Environmental Services, UDC, and the Project Learning Tree national program to bring professional education tools and training to District schoolteachers. The Project Learning Tree curriculum helps them prepare year-round environmental activities for DC students, including projects that involve kids in their communities.

Working with teachers and providing educational tools, the District Office of Recycling is building long-term relationships that will enable us to deliver environmental messages to hungry minds. The recycling office has trained 75 teachers and 30 DPW staff to be facilitators for Project Learning Tree programs.

### **Air Quality**

I know that this hearing is also addressing air quality concerns, and I wanted to take this opportunity to inform you about how DPW is contributing to the efforts to improve its operations in this area. DPW's Fleet Management Administration is recognized as a regional leader in the procurement and deployment of alternative fuel vehicles. Previously, the fleet owned 165 natural gas-powered vehicles, primarily used by the District's Parking

Services Administration. During FY03, Fleet Management made a giant step forward with the purchase of 100 additional alternative fuel vehicles. This includes 80 mid-size sedans and pickup trucks, two 16-yard natural gas trash packers (the first in the region), 18 electric utility carts and forklifts. Additionally, 1 hybrid/electric vehicle was purchased for the Department of Health. Currently there are 255 SUVs in the District's fleet, which is approximately 25 percent fewer than we had in the beginning of 2003. Fleet Management continues to take steps to reduce the number of SUV's and we intend to remove an additional 25 leased SUV's from the Fleet over the next 30 days. We remain committed to improving the quality of life in the District of Columbia by adding more environmentally friendly vehicles to the District's fleet.

Again, I'd like to thank Council for allowing me to leave the hearing early today. The Solid Waste Management Administration is receiving an award for its recycling pilot from the DC Labor Management Partnership Council, and I would like to be there to receive it.